(c) whether any review has been made about the performance of middlemen in clinching the deals?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): (a) to (c) Existing Government instructions debar the involvement of agents in the purchases being made for Armed Force. Therefore, the question of review about the performances of the middlemen in clinching the deals does not arise. Contracts concluded by the Ministry of Defence stipulate a clause on non-involvement of agents specifying that in case agents are found to be involved in the contract at a later date, the contract will be liable for termination alongwith refund of payments made under the contract with interest and black-listing of the company for a minimum period of 5 years. The amount paid as commission to the agent will also have to be refunded.

Restructuring the decision-making apparatus for weapons systems

2160. SHRI SOLIPETA RAMACHANDRA REDDY: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether a Parliamentary Committee has recommended urgent restructuring of the defence decision-making apparatus and setting up of a single integrated Board of approvals to avoid inordinate and frustrating delays in production and procurement of weapons systems; and

(b) if so, the reaction of Government thereto?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): (a) and (b) A statement will be laid on the Table of the House.

Discrimination in payment of Ex-gratia and other benefits

2161. SHRIMATI VEENA VERMA: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is any distinction between Army personnel killed in action against insurgents and terrorists, e.g. in Punjab, North-East and Jammu and Kashmir and those killed in action before 20th August, 1993 and during 1962, 1965, 1971 and the current conflict in Kargil, in the matter of payment of ex-gratia and other benefits available to the families and dependents of deceased officer;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) the reasons for the distinction and the discrimination; and

(d) the steps taken and being taken to rationalise the system?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): (a) to (d) Government policy on payment of ex-gratia to the next of kin of battle casualties was formulated for the first time in October, 1996 and under this dispensation ex-gratia of Rs. 1 lakh and Rs. 2 lakhs were paid to the families of Service personnel killed during